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Libertarians urge: End corporate welfare for Ronald McDonald and his rich friends

Unfortunately, welfare for billionaires is still “alive and well-financed”

WASHINGTON, DC — Ronald McDonald is a welfare cheat.

Despite billions in profits last year, the fast-food chain represented by the popular clown mascot pocketed \$1.6 million in taxpayers' money in 1996, the Libertarian Party noted today.

“We hear lots of complaints about welfare for individuals, but not as much about the billions of dollars in government money grabbed by wealthy corporations,” said the party's chairman, Steve Dasbach. “Thanks to Republican and Democratic politicians, corporate welfare is alive and well-financed in America.”

In Ronald McDonald's case, the Agriculture Department's Market Access Program funneled \$1.6 million in tax money to the multibillion-dollar corporation to help it sell its Big Macs and other fast-food products to Europeans.

“Anyone with a McNugget of common sense should be outraged by a program that takes money from average Americans to give to a rich corporation like McDonalds,” Dasbach said.

But finally, 25 years after the Libertarian Party first urged Congress to end such programs, the tide may be turning. At a news conference this week, Senators John McCain (R-AZ) and Russell Feingold (D-WI) announced a bill to set up a nine-member commission to study corporate welfare programs, which total at least \$30 billion a year.

“It's about time!” said Dasbach — who suggested some targets for immediate action:

■ **Mickey Mouse behavior:** The Walt Disney Corp. received \$300,000 in taxpayers' money in 1995 to “help perfect its fireworks displays,” according to research by Common Cause.

■ **Boondoggle for billionaires:** The Archer-Daniels Midland food company — which earned \$13 billion last year — has hit taxpayers up for \$6 billion in ethanol subsidies.

■ **The wine industry:** After Gallo and other California wine makers poured \$750,000 into Democratic and Republican congressional campaigns, politicians returned the favor: Gallo uncorked \$7 million in federal subsidies in 1994. The funding went to promote Gallo wine in Asia and Latin America under an “export promotion program,” which has paid California wineries over \$50 million in the last 10 years.

“Every taxpayer who learns about these programs wants them eliminated immediately,” Dasbach said. “But politicians and their rich, corporate friends have fought to protect them. It's time to protect *taxpayers* instead — and shut the corporate welfare checkbook.”

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